3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

and went all over the mountains. He seemed a good type of youth, sturdy, cheerful and independent.

The Yai Dōbe plain, on which we now debouched, is a small but perfect example of the inland drainage basins characteristic of Central Asia. Situated at an average elevation of 5,000 feet, it is some 60 miles long by 15-20 broad and is enclosed on the north by one of the parallel ranges of the Tien Shan with peaks up to 13,000 feet, on the south and east by foothills rising to 8,000 feet. It has no outlet, but boasts its own miniature Lop Nor in the shape of a salt lake near its south-eastern corner. Like the *hāmūns* of Persian Baluchistan and Sistan, this lake varies in size according to the rainfall in the mountains, from practically nothing to a sheet of water 40 or 50 square miles in area. The rest of the Yai Dōbe plian is partly barren, partly covered with tamarisks and a sparse forest of desert poplar. Some of these trees attain a great age and size; they are not in the least like poplars, resembling rather the British oak. Here and there in the forest are springs of fresh or slightly brackish water, each with farmsteads or Kirghiz tents in the vicinity. In the spring and autumn the woodland is delightful, but in summer the mosquitos and gadflies for which both it and the Maralbashi jungles to the south are notorious make it uninhabitable by man or beast.

For fifty miles we marched across this curious plain. On September 5 we passed out of the desert-poplar forest and camped the same evening at the springs of Yairam Bulak. Here two families of Kirghiz had pitched their *aq-ois* near a couple of tiny crofts shaded by willows, landmarks for miles in the great sweep of bare plain. We liked the Kirghiz of these hills and got on well with them, but we could not help noticing that they were less hospitable than their cousins of our beloved "Alps of Qungur." They never asked us into their *aq-ois*, nor did they seem to regard us guests as the others (often quite embarassingly) did. It struck me that there might be two reasons for this. In the first place, living on the Russian border, they are at once less secure and more sophisticated. In the second, a trade route much used by Turki merchants passes through their territory; these men, I was told, were in the habit of taking supplies whenever they could and not paying for them. But the Tien Shan Kirghiz could be friendly enough when once their confidence had been gained. The ladies of Yairam Bulak crowded round D., whose

3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

like they had never seen before. They were particularly impressed by the gold in my teeth; they asked D. about it, evidently thinking it was a kind of ornament. They also asked her what my other wife was like, and whether she never travelled. D. explained that in the West men had only one wife at a time, whereupon they exclaimed "Aren't you lonely?"

In this country nomadic and settled Kirghiz are mixed, not separated by an uninhabited belt and a distinct difference in level, as in the mountains to the south of the Kashgarian plain. Our next camp was at a scattered village of crofts called Pichan; behind it, a line of the curious domed tombs of Kirghiz-land cresting a bluff showed that the settlement was an old one. We made great friends with the enormously fat and jovial Beg of the place, a regular Falstaff. He told us that the little community had been almost ruined three years before, when the disturbances in Semirechia following the introduction of the Soviet régime had resulted in the migration of thousands of families, Sarts and Kirghiz, to Chinese territory. "They brought huge flocks of sheep and goats with them," he said, "which ate up all the grass, so that there was none for the Pichan flocks and they died. Our stock was thus destroyed, and now we can't work it up again because we have no surplus for breeding. But the *Khitai* (Chinese) have not reduced our cattle tax, fixed many years ago at 15 dachins (1¼*d.*) per head—they still take fifty taels a year off us, though there are no sheep. But we make no complaint, because though there is a good deal of cultivation we pay no land tax. If we attracted the Amban's attention he might find out about the cultivation, and then we would have to pay both land and cattle tax."

The fat Beg found a congenial spirit in the cheerful Hafiz, with whom he "swapped lies" uproariously far into the night. Next morning as we marched out of Pichan I happened to look round, and there were Hafiz and the Beg riding along arm-in-arm, with broad grins on their faces, each wearing the other's hat. It was one of the funniest sights I have ever seen, Hafiz in the huge black lambskin Kirghiz cap and the Beg with Hafiz' *dopa* perched like a Glengarry on the top of his vast head and face.

There was plenty of good water at Pichan, but at our next halting-place twenty miles farther up among the bare hills at Qizil Eshma, we very nearly had to go without. A family of Kirghiz were encamped at the mouth of a small side-glen apparently just as dry as the main valley. The servants I

3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

316 135 the appalling conditions under which the gold-miners work in the Zailik valley, 13,500 feet up among the peaks to the south-west of Polu; the well-known mines of Surghak and Chizghan, 60–85 miles E.S.E. of Keriya, employ 2,000 labourers even under the Chinese system. Gold is continually being found in new places between Chizghan and Tunhwang in Kansu province, 700 miles eastward. I heard at Keriya of three new mines, all rich, to which there had been miniature "gold-rushes" during the previous two or three years. All the mines between Polu and Cherchen are under the control of the Amban of Keriya, who farms them out to a Beg for a fixed annual weight of gold-dust to be delivered to the Chinese at the fixed rate of 25 taels per tael weight, about five-sevenths of the average market price at Khotan. The Beg is not supposed to extract more than that amount from the mines, but of course he does. He finds, pays and feeds his own miners, whose numbers are augmented at Surghak by numerous convicts. The Chinese do not allow the local people to wash for gold except for the Beg, and as his total output is limited by contract he does not often give the inhabitants of a village like Polu leave to wash for him. As a special favour we were given a demonstration of the primitive methods used. Three boys crawled into a hole in the conglomerate bank of the Polu stream and passed out tray after tray of blueish gravelly earth; a fourth washed it in a wooden pan shaped like a very shallow cone with a slit in it. From each trayful the boy got from two to seven tiny grains of gold, some red, some yellow; in a quarter of an hour he had washed out a quantity which he told us was worth a tenga (*2d.*) at the Beg's rates. In a day's work, he told us, he would get anything from one-tenth of a tael to 10 taels worth (*3d.*–£1 *7s.*).

•609 000 The men of Polu are exceptionally friendly and hospitable to Europeans, a fact noticed by Deasy, Stein and the few other travellers who have come this way. The villagers still remember Deasy, though his visit took place as long ago as 1897. The stable in which his ponies were kept is pointed out with pride, also the room in which stayed the Chinese *ssu-yeh* or secretary who was sent by the Amban of Keriya to watch Deasy and prevent him at all costs from finding the secret path over the Kunlun.[1] One of the *bais* or chief men, Tokhta Khalfa, told me with pride that it was his father, Rahim Khalfa, who really helped Deasy to cross the mountains.

[1] Deasy, "In Tibet and Chinese Turkistan," p. 308.

S
563 leaders from every five-tent group meet on problems of
622 importance such as taxes, Oirat-Chinese relations,
628 internal administration, new regulations and laws, etc.
S This assembly of a tribe is called in Oirat: xurug.
792 Lamaseries function as marketing centers and these are
443 the only places where non-patrilineally-related people meet each other in order to trade their products and where they go for religious festivals.

S There are slight differences in herd ownership and
563 management between the various tribes of the Western
619 Mongols. (They call themselves the "Dörwön Oirat"(or
233 "four Oirat") or Ulan-Zalatan ("those who wear red
422 tassels on their hats).) The main tribes of Western Mongols are the Torguts, the Dörböts and the Ölöts plus the Oirat proper.

S
[602] Some tribes merge the herds of related and non-related
[609] individuals while others do not. The basis for different types of economic activities is the "non-kinship-relationship."
S Some Western Mongolian tribes came in contact with
563 other peoples more than other tribes did, in the course of
177 history, with the result that customs, usage, and tradition
S underwent slight changes. Nevertheless, the pattern of
[184] authority, of inheritance, and the fact that the extended family represents a basic functional unit for purposes of taxation, exogamy, election, etc., are by and large the same in all tribes.

N The Salars:
563 In the Chinese province of Kansu are found three classes
794 of Moslems. There are those who have descended from the merchants on the old trade route from China through Persia to Arabia; another group has evolved from the Uighur branch of the Hun family; and finally there are the Salars. The Salars are of pure Turkish origin and are among the latest arrivals in China.

N To their new home the Salars brought with them the
[197] original Turkish language and to this day that is their spoken
N language. The men have learned just a few words of Chinese
[191] and the women hardly any. This is one of the indications of a
N lack of assimilation which is characteristic of the Moslems
563 in the west of China. Thus there is a general similarity among
794 the Moslems of Kansu and a dissimilarity between them and
177 Moslems further east. With the progression eastward assim-
184 ilation of Islam to the Chinese way of life increases to the extent that finally the only difference is the abstinence from eating pork.

This difference in the degree of assimilation can be attributed to four factors: the Moslems in the east have been exposed to

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birds had made their nests. This was the most striking example of wind erosion that we saw.

This last stage had been taken in company with Mr. Hunter, whose little cart frequently made better stages than our heavy vehicles could manage. At this point we were all needing small repairs to our carts, and also the stony roads had become very heavy on the shoes of our teams, but Mr. Hunter now produced a travelling farrier's outfit, and with the help of his man shod the mules, greatly to the admiration of the Chinese by-standers, who commented freely on the resourcefulness of this experienced traveller. Mr. Hunter's man was a Mongolian youth, called 'Nimga.' The Living Buddha, to whom he was subject, had given him as an orphan boy to the missionaries. He always slept where he could watch the horses, and on one occasion, when he felt certain that horse-stealers were prowling around, lay down on a horse's back and slept there. His horsemanship was splendid, accustomed as he was to riding from infancy.

The Turki innkeeper, a tall, lean, bearded Moslem, looked with some suspicion at this party of foreigners. 'What have they come for?' he asked Mr. Hunter. 'Is it bones, plants or game that they want?' 'Nothing of the kind,' was the answer, 'these are missionaries.'

'Oh, that's different,' he grunted, 'but some of those who come, why there's no knowing what they want! There was a man here once upon a time, and his servant told me that he came to Chekulu in order to measure the distance to the sun! A likely tale! Couldn't he measure it in his own country? Surely you can *sometimes* see the sun in Western lands?'

For four hours that evening we descended a smooth, downhill road, and on reaching the plain entered a sandy basin about twenty miles across, the lower part